

WASHINGTON, Tuesday, September 5 — Jefferson County is receiving a federal grant of \$150,000 to create a mental health court for non-violent offenders suffering from mental illness, U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) announced today.

The mental health court will provide an accelerated docket and pretrial supervision for mentally ill non-violent offenders. These offenders will receive a mental health screening before their trial, a mental health treatment plan and monitoring by a case manager and the court.

"The number of mentally ill in our criminal justice system is significant. About 100 inmates in Jefferson County are considered mentally ill. This grant will help provide funds needed for proper incarceration and treatment of mentally ill inmates," said Bachus. "The idea is to get non-violent mentally ill inmates the help they need so they won't commit more serious crimes in the future."

Bachus said Jefferson County is receiving one of only a handful of grant awards being made by the Bureau of Justice Assistance this year. "Jefferson County is awarded one of only 22 grants being made nationwide. More than 1,300 proposals were received from state and local governments across the nation," said Bachus.

The mental health court is a joint effort involving the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, UAB, the District Attorney's Office, Fellowship House, and Birmingham Health Care for the Homeless.

"Jails have become the nation's surrogate mental hospitals. Nationally, an estimated 200,000 inmates have mental problems," said Bachus. "The mentally ill frequently end up in jail and often leave without treatment. With this Mental Health Court in Jefferson County, inmates will receive treatment while being supervised by the criminal justice system. In the end, the result will be less crime and fewer victims of crime."

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Additional information on Jefferson County Mental Health Court grant:

The Jefferson County Sheriff Department's Mental Health Crisis Section estimates that 125-150 mentally ill individuals are housed at any given time in the jurisdiction's jail.

In order to assure a comprehensive continuum of services, links with community-based organizations have been established to meet participant needs. For example, offenders requiring residential treatment will be referred to the Fellowship House, a substance abuse treatment provider. Participants lacking stable housing will be referred to Birmingham Health Care for the Homeless, a non-profit agency operating a single-room occupancy facility with on-site mental health treatment services.

Offenders participating in the program will be supervised for a period of six months to one year depending on treatment compliance and progress.

The judge assigned to the Mental Health Court will be trained in the areas of mental illness and community resources to assure that offenders receive appropriate judicial oversight.

Jefferson County estimates total cost of the program will be \$180,000. They sought \$150,000 through the federal grant and will contribute the remaining \$30,000.